

## **cold eyes, haunting me by maplestreet83**

**Series:** [when summer's gone, where will we be? \[3\]](#)

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Angst, Character Study, Drabble, Gen, Implied/Referenced Character Death, Maxine "Max" Mayfield Needs a Hug

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Maxine "Max" Mayfield

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2021-07-21

**Updated:** 2021-07-21

**Packaged:** 2022-03-31 10:53:08

**Rating:** General Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 1,709

**Publisher:** [archiveofourown.org](https://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary:**

Max struggles to find her place at Hawkins High, being reminded of the students that will never walk its halls again.

## **cold eyes, haunting me**

It felt like they were looking right at her, their cold unblinking stares boring into the back of her head every single time she had to pass the plaque up on the science hallway. Sure the school hadn't meant anything by it, putting up the framed plaque at the start of the semester had been a respectful gesture. A way to remember and honor the lives of the five Hawkins High students that had been lost in the tragic Starcourt fire on the Fourth of July. There had been an assembly at the start of the school year where the plaque had been unveiled to a gym full of students, Police Chief Powell and principal Lawrence giving their somber speeches about the promising futures cut short and the community spirit that was going to help everyone heal together. Max had figured that if she could just get through that assembly, stare blankly at the back wall, and press her nails into the skin on the balls of her hands so hard that the prick of pain would distract her enough, that it would get her through it. That it would all be over once the shrill sound of the bell announced the end to the assembly. And for a couple of days it had seemed like that was the case, as the school year properly started, and the student body seemed to naturally move on from discussing the grisly details of the horrible events of the summer, to talking about classes, after curriculars and back to school parties.

But then one day, a week or so into her freshman year, Max was hurrying down the halls to get to her Algebra class, cursing the History teacher who had held the class up by explaining their first assignment. The class for Algebra was pretty much halfway across the whole school from History class, and the hallways were nearly empty as Max rushed along them. She was walking so fast, the only thing on her mind getting to the class before the bell, cursing the still unfamiliar labyrinth of high school hallways, that she almost didn't notice what was now hanging on the wall next to the vending machine. And she wasn't sure what exactly it was that made her look at it but whatever it had been, she glanced sideways at it as she had already mostly passed it. She stopped on her tracks. Because there it was again. The large plaque with a bronze frame, raised gold letters on a shiny black background and the five black and white yearbook pictures in a neat row under the capital letters spelling "We

*Remember.*" And Max felt like she was going to throw up.

That sick feeling returned every single time she was forced to walk past the plaque to get to class. Each time she tried to rush past it, hoping the hallway would be crowded enough that she wouldn't be able to see it. But as hard as she tried to avoid looking at it, the names on the plaque still burned themselves onto her retinas, hovering over her in the dark as she tried to fall asleep. Keith Davis, 15 – last seen at the 4th of July Fun Fair, trying to win the dart balloon game. Melissa Scott, 17 – the captain of the girl's volleyball team. Jack Wright, 17 – the male lead of the school's production of 'Oklahoma!' that past spring. Heather Holloway, 18 – popular lifeguard, newly graduated senior heading to Purdue in the fall... and dead along with her entire family. And Max didn't even need to look at the plaque to know what was written under the last picture. They were all dead because of her. If she'd acted quicker, been smarter, done things differently, they could all be living their day-to-day lives, stressing over crushes and assignments and team practices. If she'd realized what was going on with Billy sooner, been able to get through to him like El had, they'd still be alive. But she hadn't been smart, she hadn't been observant enough or acted quick enough and now as a reminder the five pairs of still, blank eyes followed her as she passed by every day. Who was she, walking to class as if nothing had happened, while the five of them could never walk along the crowded halls ever again?

Three weeks into the semester Max found an alternative route that could take her from History to Algebra without having to pass the memorial plaque. It was way longer, meaning she had to really book it to make it to class on time and run up an extra stairwell, but she could live with it if it meant she could avoid the daily wave of guilt and nausea. It was now the second day of her taking the route and Max was taking the stairs two at a time as she hurried forward, checking her watch to see she still had about two minutes left. Just enough time to make it.

"Oh, hi Max!"

Max looked up from looking at her watch and saw Dustin walking up

the stairs beside her.

"Hey," she said as they got up the stairs, starting along the hallway.

"What are you doing over here? I thought you had History with Mike just now?" he asked.

"Yeah I did. And Algebra now. What do you need my whole class schedule for?" Max shot back with a raised brow.

"I don't, I'm just saying that you should take the east hallway to go to Algebra. It's way more convenient," Dustin explained, and Max knew he was just giving friendly advice, way too proud of himself for having been the first of them to learn the school layout by heart. But she really didn't feel like explaining her pick of route to him right now.

"Okay, I'll check it out tomorrow, thanks," Max said with a smile she hoped was polite and showed that she was listening to his suggestion, before hurrying off towards Algebra.

Two days later Max had just left History class, ready to take a left and start her roundabout route through the school when she heard Dustin calling out her name from across the hall.

"Hey, did you have a hard time finding that stairwell?" he asked, walking up to her.

"Well I—" Max started to explain, but he just waved his hand, already turning to walk the other way and saying:

"Come on, I'll show you!"

"You don't have to, don't want to make you be late," Max tried but it seemed like Dustin had already made up his mind.

"Come on Max, this will cut your walking time in like half, let me help you out," he explained.

Max sighed, begrudgingly following him along the hall, her grip tight

on her backpack straps in tense anticipation.

Walking up the stairs and onto the science hallway Max tried her best to just focus on what Dustin was talking about, something about wanting to check out the school's official D&D club. But when they got closer and closer to the plaque, she couldn't help it, casting her gaze strictly to the floor, feeling her heartbeat speeding up, the cold sense of regret and panic flooding back in. In ten more steps they would have passed it. Eight steps, five, three...

"Woah, so this is where they put this?" Dustin suddenly pointed out, stopping right in front of the plaque and Max cursed under her breath.

"Hmm?" she hummed in question, looking up, trying to seem like she didn't know what he was talking about.

"The mall memorial plaque. I didn't know where they put it after the assembly."

He looked up at the plaque, quietly studying it and Max wanted to be anywhere else but standing there needing to pretend she didn't want to run away or throw up.

"Man, next week it's gonna be three months since the 4th of July. Can you believe that?"

"No," Max simply replied, Dustin not seeming to pay her much mind as he shook his head, muttering out a "That's so weird."

Max cast her eyes down again, noticing she had started to press her nails into her palms again, and she tried to anchor to the prick of pain, using it to keep herself together in the middle of the busy hallway. The hallway that the people in the plaque pictures should be walking along instead, and would be if she had worked just a little harder, been a little smarter and less naïve.

"Hey, you okay?" Dustin asked, startling her and Max quickly looked up, seeing him looking at her in confusion and slight worry. Max opened her mouth to say something but nothing seemed to come out. Come on, think of something! Dustin's eyes darted over to the plaque

and then back, realization quickly dawning on his face.

“Oh shit, sorry, I didn’t...”

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it,” Max quickly cut in to say, pushing her feet to move along, starting to rush towards the Algebra classroom.

“But thanks for helping me out, see you in English!” she called out to Dustin with a quick wave of her hand, not daring to look back at him or the plaque. Dustin probably called out something in reply, but the loud school bell rang just then, drowning it out as Max entered the classroom without looking back.

But whatever it was that Dustin had wanted to say, he didn’t bring it up again. And when him and Max sometimes happened to bump into each other in the hallway or in the staircase as she took the long route to Algebra, he didn’t say anything about it, instead just humoring her with a weird story or science fact he had to offer that day. And when October 4th rolled around, without anyone else seeing, Dustin casually dropped a 3 Musketeers bar on Max’s lunch tray with a quick but empathetic smile before continuing with the loud Star Wars debate with the rest of the lunch table. It didn’t make the cold sinking feeling of guilt go away, but for a moment it helped, helped Max believe that maybe she could have a place at Hawkins High.

### **Author's Note:**

I'm really intrigued to see where the show is going to take Max's storyline in season 4. There are so many complicated emotions in play with her after the events of season 3, I couldn't help but write something about it myself. I'd love to hear in the comments what thoughts and hopes you guys might have for Max next season!